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AUTHOR Carr, Kathy
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ABSTRACT

Language arts textbooks provide the materials for this curriculum design based on thematic units of literature. Focused on stimulating student motivation, stressing skill practice and offering feedback through discussion and authors' workshops, this design lists sample terminal objectives for developing the following language arts skills for grades six through eight: listening, oral language, reading and locating information, and writing. The design also offers two examples of thematic units that illustrate the use of literature in developing language arts skills: a first person writing unit that focuses on writing personal and fictional diaries and writing personal letters, and a literature unit that concentrates on the stories of Mark Twain and presents activities in listening, oral language, vocabulary concept development, literature appreciation, and writing. (MAI)

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A LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Kathy Carr

Shelve, but don't discard, your language arts textbooks for middle school or junior high school and write your own curriculum based upon thematic units of literature. The books may be used for individual lessons and as a source for literary selections.

The rationale for this proposal comes from several recognized theories of learning: the principle of motivation, the principle of practice, the principle of feedback, and the theory that literacy skills depend upon a strong oral base.

ORAL BASIS FOR LITERACY

We agree with Bill Martin, James Moffett, and others that listening, speaking and thinking skills are the backbone of language arts and that time spent on them will pay off in terms of better reading and writing. Students need to hear literature in order to tune their ears to the rhythm and syntax of language and to expand their experiences and concepts. Students need opportunities to express themselves orally through creative dramatics and to verbalize concepts through group discussion.

MOTIVATION, PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

The principle of motivation tells us that students need real reasons to communicate, as opposed to practice exercises from a textbook. The principle of practice tells us that opportunities for students to practice their communication skills should be multiplied many times over the hour a day set aside for "English" class. As Daniel Fader says in Hooked on Books, students learn to write by writing and writing and writing!

Students need feedback as to how well they have communicated their ideas, now, not tomorrow or the day after when the teacher gets the papers graded. Moffett recommends student interaction through discussion groups and authors' workshops for immediate feedback. Learning theory suggests that communication skills can thrive in an atmosphere that staturates the student in language experiences.

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OBJECTIVES BASED

The roadmap for curriculum development requires that we specify the destination before starting on the trip. Thus, teachers at the middle school must identify terminal objectives in language arts for students at that level. Sample terminal objectives follow.

LISTENING SKILL OUTCOMES: GRADES 6 through 8

OBJECTIVE

Students will be able to:

1. Identify the central theme and associated supportive items from material at the appropriate grade level that has been listened to.
2. Make inferences and predict outcomes from what has been listened to in oral passages at the appropriate grade level.
3. Distinguish opinion from fact, propaganda or inaccuracy from objective information typically found in the public news media.

ORAL LANGUAGE OUTCOMES: GRADES 6 through 8

OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to:

1. Read aloud with expression, observing phrasing and punctuation, material which he can read silently.
2. Participate in group and/or panel discussions:
   A. Confining contributions to the topic
   B. Presenting supporting evidence
   C. Participating according to the proper procedure for the activity
3. From a condensed story plot, enact a scene improvising dialogue while remaining "in character."
4. Make a class presentation in which he/she clearly explains or demonstrates an object or chart.

5. Give an oral report having at least 3 points organized by chronology or comparative degree.
6. Oral Language will evidence:
   A. Proper use of pronouns
   B. Agreement between subject and predicate

READING AND LOCATING INFORMATION SKILLS: GRADES 6 through 8

OBJECTIVE

1. From material they have read:
   A. Identify the central theme
   B. Draw inferences
   C. Discriminate fact from opinion
2. Identify figurative language and metaphorical interpretations from material that has been read.
3. Demonstrate ability to use:
   A. Encyclopedia
   B. Dictionary
   C. Almanac
   D. Card catalog
   E. Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature
4. Student language skills will equal or exceed score distributions of previous students in the district on tasks of:
   A. Work knowledge
   B. Language
   C. Spelling

WRITING OUTCOMES: GRADES 6 through 8

OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to:

1. Write sentences that express a single idea in a clear, direct and concise manner.
2. Construct a paragraph with a topic sentence and supportive development.

3. In writing longer passages, start a new paragraph each time there is a new idea introduced.
4. Writing samples will evidence:
   A. Proper use of pronouns
   B. Agreement of subjects and predicates
   C. Appropriate use of conventional punctuation
   D. Accurate spelling of 90% of words they use in writing
5. In short essay writing he/she will explain generalizations with concrete detail.
6. Transcribe by recording events/activities of a meeting or story in accurate detail.
7. Use reference materials to gather information on a topic, limit the topic for the purpose, select appropriate items, and organize the product logically.
8. Revise, edit and proofread his/her own writing, making it clear and effective for the reader.

THEMATIC UNITS

Two examples of thematic units which illustrate the use of literature to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing are given. Other unit topics might be, "Horror Tales," "Folk Tales, Legends, Fables, Myths," "Poetry," and "Short Story."

FIRST PERSON WRITING UNIT

Suggested source:
Interaction Books, Level 3, Houghton Mifflin
Diaries and Fictional Diaries

Objectives:
1. The student will record a detailed series of diary entries about one main action (real or imaginary).
2. The student will write for himself as audience (diaries will eventually be shared and should not be too personal).
3. The student will write fictional diaries, assuming another person's character.

4. The student will support generalized statements and feelings with specific details.
5. The student will make the distinction between private and public diaries.
6. The student will write diaries in the most natural voice, although edited.
7. The student will see the diary as a source for other writing, as for retelling as a third person story.

Activities:

1. Keep a running diary (public).
2. Teacher read selections from published diaries to class.
3. Class read additional selections.
4. Make tape recordings for students who have difficulty reading.
5. Students write own diaries, edit and refine, and bind into "books" to be shared.

Evaluation:

1. Class participation.
2. Final product.

Letters

Objectives:

1. The student will write for an audience of one particular person (fictional or real).
2. The student will respond to the issues raised in a letter.
3. The student will see correspondence as replying to something one has written.
4. The student will learn to take another person's point of view.

Activities:

1. Read examples of published letters (see material).
2. Write a picture letter like Teddy Roosevelt's letter to his daughter.
3. Create a correspondence writing both parts (Role play the other person).
4. Write a letter asking for advice as to Dear Abby or Dr. Lamb in the newspaper. Other students answer.
5. Carry on a genuine correspondence (with an adult, other students, pen pal).

Evaluation:

1. Class participation.
2. Evaluation of products from activities.

Autobiography and Fictional Autobiography

Objectives:

1. The student will search for a role model.
2. The student will gain recognition of point of view. He/she will show how a past event looks from the present point of view.
3. The student will use specific, concrete details to support a generalization.
4. The student will make a brief outline to limit focus.
5. The student will organize material to write a first person narrative with a main theme or sequence.

Activities:

1. Read Selections.
2. Show students graphic outline: (1) I was this way in the beginning. (2) Something happened to me. (3) This is how I was changed.
3. Immitate the structure of a major autobiographical work, writing own autobiographical paper.

Evaluation:

Evaluate final product on basis of objectives 2, 3, 4, & 5.

UNIT ON MARK TWAIN

Materials:

Selections from Mark Twain, such as the following:

The Prince & the Pauper

The Stolen White Elephant

Tom Sawyer

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

The Cat & the Painkiller

Huck Finn's Disguise

The Pony Express

Objectives

1. Listening: Make inferences and predict outcomes from what has been listened to in oral passages.
2. Listening: Distinguish opinion from fact, propaganda or inaccuracy from objective information.
3. Oral Language: Read aloud with expression, observing phrasing and punctuation.
4. Oral Language: Participate in group or panel discussions, confining contributions to the topic and presenting supporting evidence.
5. Oral Language: Enact a scene improvising dialogue while remaining in character.
6. Oral Language: Be able to use standard forms of English and recognize dialectual forms.
7. Vocabulary-Concept Development: Identify figurative language, metaphorical interpretations, and colorful expressions.
8. Literature: Study and compare a novel, satire, and reportorial prose.
9. Literature: Learning something of the life and background of the author and his significance in American literature.
10. Writing: Practice first person narrative reporting after reading The Pony Express.
11. Writing: Try writing satire after reading The Stolen White Elephant.

Suggested Activities (not necessarily in sequence)

1. Write Hannibal, Mo. Chamber of Commerce for information.
2. View a performance (live, TV or film) representing the character and background of the author.
3. Read aloud to the class the novel Tom Sawyer. During the reading work toward meeting objectives 1, 2, 6 & 7 through class discussions, and "why" questions. Write phrases on the board for study.
4. Divide into groups to improvise and dramatize scenes from the story.
5. Dramatize the "White Washing" scene and discuss the "con" or psychology involved. Devise new situations.
6. Role play to gain different points of view, how adults looked at Tom, etc.
7. Students prepare a dramatic reading or read selections that are written in play form.

8. Have a panel discussion or small group discussions on some moral issue raised by the story.

9. After a study of satire, practice writing satire.

10. After a study of first person narrative reporting practice writing same.

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